

Abstract 560

TITLE: Women, Risk and Speed: Implications for HIV, HepC Prevention among Female Methamphetamine Users

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ISSUE: Women's HIV, HepC, STD, reproductive health risk and violence due to methamphetamine abuse.

SETTING: The NIDA supported Substance Use Risk Exploration study targets high risk populations regarding drug abuse in Western Washington. The project examines drug use, HIV, HepC, and STD risk behaviors of these populations. The state of Washington has experienced an 1100% increase in methamphetamine admissions over a 9 year period. Fifty-five percent of the current admissions have IDU histories; 47% of the admissions are women.

PROJECT: A pilot sample of female methamphetamine users was recruited through outreach, snowball sampling, and referrals from service providers. Subjects were interviewed using an open-ended ethnographic format assessing the issues of: drug use behaviors, risks and consequences; sexual behavior; life history, reproductive history, current living situation; emotional and physical problems. Unobtrusive observations were conducted at public sites and scenes in which methamphetamine use was reported to occur. Interviews were taped and field notes were recorded. Analysis utilized EZtext.

RESULTS: N=23. 61% of the women reported histories of injection drug use; 61% were white; 39% were women of color. A majority were heterosexual; 34% reported bisexual or same sex histories. A sub-population of methamphetamine using exotic dancers was identified. Reasons for use included: enhanced self-esteem, decreased social anxiety; weight control; partner influence; increased energy and disinhibition for sexier dancing; enhanced sexual experience; partying and improved focus at work. HIV risk behaviors included: using previously used rigs; sharing needles; multiple sexual partners; intercourse without a condom; sharing straws. Additional personal risks included: prolonged runs without sleeping; malnutrition; inadequate hydration; living in drug use settings; staying with an abusive partner; using in the car and driving while high or coming down.

LESSONS LEARNED: Data points to high levels of HIV, HepC, STD and other health risks (e.g., personal violence) among these women. There is concomitant immediate need for educational outreach, HIV testing and counseling, STD screening and treatment targeted to female meth users. Linkages to HIV treatment and substance abuse treatment are also critical. Meth-using women represent a hidden and poorly understood population but are at elevated HIV risk. New models for prevention and intervention are urgently needed.

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